TEACHING ENGLISH TO ECONOMICS STUDENTS

Sim Monica Ariana
Universitatea din Oradea, Facultatea de Științe Economice, Oradea, Str. Universității nr.1, Tel.: 0259-408407, e-mail: msim@uoradea.ro

The present paper focuses on the current needs of a faculty specialized in teaching Economics when it comes to foreign language teaching – especially English language. It also talks about the great help and the importance of computers in the process of language teaching in a non-philological faculty.

Key words: foreign languages, computers, terminology

Language is the main means of communicating - it’s a fact - even though, strangely enough, it can become the most important obstacle in communication. This lack of communication may be either the result of not being able to understand some concepts in your own language, or the consequence of using different languages. In this paper we will mainly focus on the second circumstance, when not knowing at least another foreign language may transform you in a handicapped person.

There are several solutions to the problem of understanding each other when using different languages, such as using translators or translations, offering the status of a global language to one of the nowadays languages – thing that has already happened without even noticing - or, simpler, trying to teach the man to fish instead of giving him food once, meaning adopting adequate special policies so as to encourage teaching and learning foreign languages. As a matter of fact, the language that has become a global or international language is English, and this status was brought along by at least two essential factors: the expansion of the colonial British Empire on one hand, and the great economic and politic upheaval of the Unites States of America. English (with its different names: British, American, Australian etc English) is presently being used by 1.5 billion people, almost 1/4 of the entire world population as it appears in the latest UNESCO researches. All in all, the thing that interests us the most is that English is the main foreign language taught in kindergartens, schools or universities worldwide.

The development of the new and modern means of communication (telephone, television, computers) especially of the Internet is another reason why more and more people want to learn English as all these require the knowledge of at least one international language. This ever-growing usage of the electronic mail, of the Internet led to an increasing number of the members of the global community faced to a serious need to overcome the language barrier. Consequently, it is necessary to find some measures so as to force students realize the importance of English for their further development, and also, the necessity to learn a correct English language, otherwise, the use without any constraints and norms would probably bring about a chaotic evolution of the foreign language and the appearance of different “forms” of English.

In what the economic domain is concerned, the measures that have to be proposed focus on the specialized scientific language, used by specialists who could lead to chaotic changes with dramatic consequences. Still, there should be found an authority to assume this role of norm and standard setter and, moreover, of supervisor who makes sure these rules are followed.

Using the computer when teaching and learning a foreign language – especially English language- has several advantages among them: it is a real open door to diverse resources, it also means learning a language by means of exploring a huge linguistic data, acquiring knowledge and developing the necessary skills and abilities needed in order to properly use the computer in realistic situations, the possibility for students to work in teams and collaborate encouraging teamwork as well as competition.

Another immense advantage that computers offers to students in this informational era is that they may go on learning on their own, using the means and resources that could be found on-line and off-line, too. They need to be taught how to ask questions (in order to find what they are searching for), they also have to have their own learning strategies, how to make up with their own minuses, means of self-assessment etc. Students must also be encouraged to develop the ability to select and assess the materials they actually need and can use from the huge data they may be confronted with. Still, it is English teacher who must teach himself in the first place how to better use computers and Internet so as to be able to supervise and encourage students in this respect.

Currently, The Faculty of Economics has a specialized laboratory: ‘The Foreign Languages Laboratory” where students may learn English, French, German and Italian assisted by computers. Even though, the great number of practical courses and that of students attending The Faculty of Economics does not allow all students to full access to this laboratory. Obviously, even if the necessary resources might have existed, computers cannot and should not be considered a teacher substitute, it should remain just a means to an end, a tool.

Consequently, teaching, assessing and self-assessing the 1st, 2nd and 3rd year students may take place only during practical courses and following the data base – resources with individual access, being conceived by some English teachers so as to be of a real help to students. Moreover, due to financial reasons, such a data bank has to be limited to programs taken from the Interned for free- accessible to both English Teachers and students as compared to commercial programs that have to be purchased a license in order to be installed on personal computers. Purchasing authoring programs such as Libra, Dasher, Choicemaster still remains a wishful thing.

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So what does a data base mean when referring to resources for an English practical course to be taught to Economics students? They should be: special reading, pronunciation, writing, vocabulary programs very useful for reviewing, consolidating and improving the general, basic language knowledge; specialized materials for economics: dictionaries (monolingual, bilingual, specialized), atlases, encyclopedias. The materials should cover all the language skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) and they should be offered to students according to their level of language knowledge (beginner, intermediate, advanced).

On the other hand, there are plenty of useful web pages extremely helpful for practicing grammar and vocabulary, reading or writing as well. Some of the grammar exercises are games (drill-as-game, Hangman, Word Attack!). Besides all these resources available on the Internet, computers may be excellent means of varying the monotony of any reading, translating exercise. Students themselves may be in the position of creating their own databases regarding the issues and topics discussed during English practical courses. They may work in teams and conceive PowerPoint project presentations both when it comes to 1st year students and the ‘general English’ about ‘general topics’ and 2nd year students with economics issues and special terminology. Students learn better if there is diversity and the pace changes frequently and they do not have time to get bored. Thus, computer presentations appeal to them and it is a great aid in many respects: students access the Internet data in order to find and select the needed materials for their projects; they work in a team; they use English in their reading, assessing, selecting, conceiving activities, not to mention the fact they have to present the materials in English, to speak freely and fluently while the rest of the class watches the slides on computer screens. Such an example of an oral presentation for the 2nd year students is the presentation of The National Bank of Romania as compared with other National Banks from abroad.

The economics terminology is neither very easy nor very difficult. What we mean by this statement is that most of the new concepts describing economic phenomena come from Latin or Greek. Therefore they are quite accessible to Romanians. Anyway, the spelling and pronunciations are an issue here and teachers should help students learn the proper orthography, spelling or pronunciation so as to prevent them from making serious mistakes.

The specialized materials of English for specific purpose -here for economics- exist either on the Internet or on CD-ROM: numerous economic atlases, encyclopedias, textbooks, programs that should be studied not only for the economic information, but also for the economic terminology. English teachers ought to settle some research papers: case studies, scientific articles, summaries, book presentations so as to activate, refresh and improve the vocabulary useful for economics students. Translations from and into English prove to be a resourceful exercise because students find themselves forced to use specialized dictionaries or encyclopedias. No matter which is the context, it is of utmost importance for students to become aware of the characteristics of the economic language and discourse, to be able to handle the economic terminology both orally and in the written form.

Any student must know the Romanian educational system as well as its correspondence and connections with other educational systems abroad. Thus, computers come again to help. The data banks we have mentioned above should include useful links, sites, contact addresses of different Research Institutions from abroad. Students need to fulfill their education, to enlarge their horizon and being in touch with what happens worldwide is essential.

Generally speaking, students need to be presented lists of journals in English, newspapers, magazines, as well as dictionaries and encyclopedias available on the Internet, to be accustomed to use search engines – Google, Yahoo, Alta Vista- so as to be able to permanently get in touch with the needed specialized information as well as with English language.

Consequently, we can state that nowadays it is out of question that computers are an extremely useful tool for learning a foreign language (especially English which is actually called the language of computers and of the Internet) or that handling a foreign language is essential for the proper intellectual development of any individual or society.

As a conclusion, it is the English teachers’ task and duty to elaborate, design, create computer assisted teaching strategies focused on the individual research and using the resources available on the Internet until we will get further more advanced technological equipment.

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